



Date: July 18, 2003
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BLM ASKS PUBLIC TO REVIEW HORSETHIEF PROPOSAL

The BLM Billings Field Office is asking the public to review and comment on its Horsethief Hazard Fuels Reduction Project Environmental Assessment (EA) and unsigned Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI).

The proposed project area is located approximately three miles west of Roundup in the wildland-urban interface. BLM-administered lands in the 10,348-acre project area contain overstocked stands of ponderosa pine and juniper that are very receptive to ignition. The purpose of the project is to change fire behavior to protect the town of Roundup, private structures adjacent to BLM land, and natural resources.

The environmental assessment analyzes three alternatives: No Action, Proposed Action, and Forest Health Alternative. The management options included in these alternatives range from not completing any vegetation treatments to intensively treating the majority of the ponderosa pine-juniper vegetation. Under the Proposed Action, mechanical and manual vegetation treatments would occur on 2,275 BLM-administered

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acres. The treatments may result in some commercial products being removed.

Approximately 800 acres near drainages would not be treated in order to minimize impact on soil, water, visual resources, and wildlife habitat. The 7,275 acres of grassland or sagebrush-grassland in the project area would not be treated under any alternative.

Secretary of the Interior Gale Norton selected the Horsethief project as a pilot project for National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) streamlining under President Bush's Healthy Forests Initiative. One of the goals of the initiative is to improve regulatory processes to ensure more timely decisions, greater efficiency, and better results in reducing the risk of catastrophic wildfires by restoring forest and rangeland health.

Comments should be submitted by August 21, 2003, to the Billings Field Office, 5001 Southgate Drive, Billings, MT 59101. The EA and FONSI are available on the internet at www.mt.blm.gov or by calling the Billings Field Office at 406-896-5013.

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